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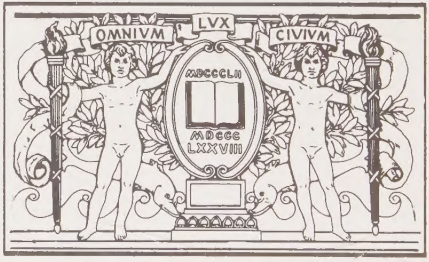

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ANATOLE FRANCE

By W. L. GEORGE

NOVELS

A BED OF ROSES
THE CITY OF LIGHT
ISRAEL KALISCH. (*American Title*: *UNTIL THE DAY BREAK*)
THE MAKING OF AN ENGLISHMAN
THE SECOND BLOOMING

SHORT STORIES

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MISCELLANEOUS

WOMAN AND TO-MORROW
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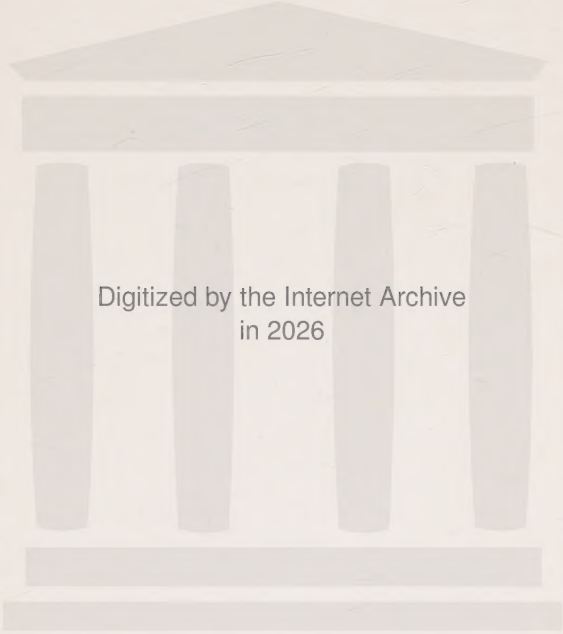
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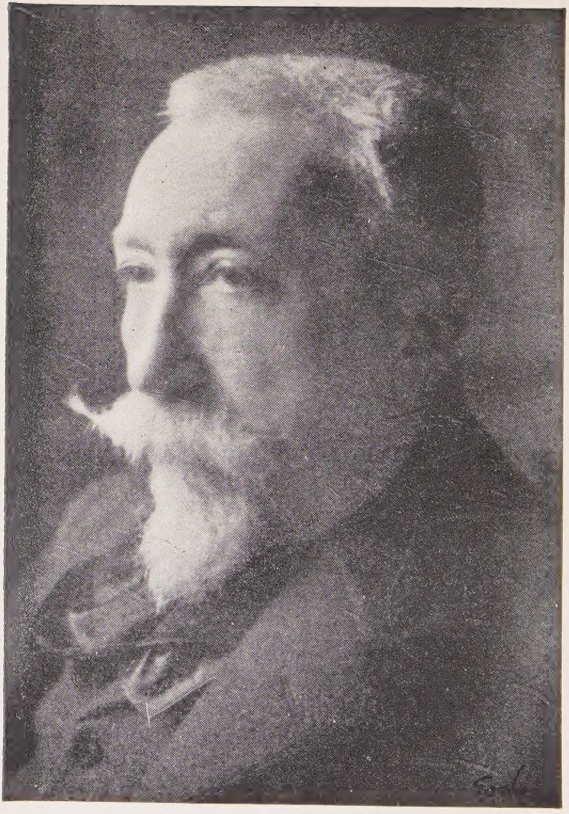

ANATOLE FRANCE

ANATOLE FRANCE

By

W. L. GEORGE

NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

First Published in 1915

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AUTHOR'S NOTICE

In this monograph I have used the translated titles of the works. When French titles appear it should be inferred that the book in question is so far untranslated.

TO MY FRIEND

SASHA KROPOTKIN LEBEDEFF

I

INTRODUCTORY

IRONY is for the ironic. He has shown himself military at the last, but I believe Anatole France would have smiled, a little wistfully, if told that a young man had sentenced himself to read every one of his works and to write a book about them while there raged round him a European War. Such an atmosphere may seem unpropitious, but it was not really so; it was an atmosphere of paradox; it was odd to analyse the great pacifist while Europe writhed in conflict; still odder to think of him as throwing aside his pen and at the age of seventy taking up his forsworn sword. But in the case of Anatole France the work is as great as the man and it afforded me a contrast with patriotism. This background of patriotism, so queerly compounded of beer, sweat, fine courage,

self-sacrifice, self-interest, of insane prejudices, heavy ignorances and melting heroisms, was so exactly what I needed to bring out the dapper quality of the great Frenchman's thought. No muddled impulses here, but a clear, cold light which reveals, together with all that is beautiful, all that is ugly; here a brain that is without illusions, and yet without bitterness; that is not taken in by flags, and priests, and frontiers, yet at the same time can love priests for their faith, flags for their symbolism, frontiers for the contrasts they create in man. In *On Life and Letters,* Anatole France tells us that during the war of 1870 he sat practically under the fire of the German guns, with M. F. Calmette, reading Virgil. I did not write these lines under the fire of the German guns but, in the hectic atmosphere of war-time, to write about Anatole France created in me no doubt much the same kind of feeling as was his that day.

I do not apologise for the egotism which

is already invading this monograph, and I suppose I shall remain egotistic as I go on. For the works of Anatole France are too bulky, too many to be appraised one by one ; they raise so many issues that a fat quarto volume would hardly suffice to analyse all, and it would be rather dull. Believing that criticism is " the adventures of the soul among masterpieces," I am much more inclined to give the adventures of my intellect (claiming no soul) among the works of Anatole France. I have read very little about him, indeed but one book, by Mr Georg Brandes, and in the early part of 1914 a number of articles when Anatole France paid us a visit. They are very distressing, those articles, as they appear to have been written mainly by men who do not know what they are talking about, but can talk about it exactly to the extent of a column. I refer to the alleged evolution of Anatole France, of which something must be said a little further on.

The temptation to translate long quota-

tions was very great, for translation is a challenging exercise and an uneasy, but, so far as possible, I have resisted it. I think it only fair to say that, as a rule, I have not translated very closely, but attempted to render selected passages, fitting the style to the matter; that is, for philosophic or descriptive passages I have, as much as possible, used Latinised English; for the more familiar portions I have drawn upon our slender stock of Anglo-Saxon.[1] As for the classifications, Anatole France satirist, critic, politician, philosopher, etc., they are necessarily rather rough; they overlap because not one of his books is one thing, and one thing only. In that direction too I must claim the reader's indulgence.

Yet another word: I come neither to bury

[1] I should like to say in this respect that I am greatly indebted to Mr John Lane, who owns the British copyright of most of the works of Anatole France, for leave not only to quote portions of his translations, but also to retranslate and condense the French text. A full list of the English titles of the works will be found at the end of this volume.

Anatole France nor to praise him; there is in one-man criticism a danger that it should be too favourable, for the critic tends to choose as a subject an author whom he whole-heartedly worships. Now I do not worship Anatole France; I have had to read every one of his works over again in the last few weeks, and if there is anything calculated to make one hate a writer for evermore it is to read all his works one after the other. People are afraid to criticise Anatole France adversely; he seems to have attained the position now accorded to Galileo (who was tortured), to Joan of Arc (who was burned), to Wagner (who was hooted), to everybody, in fact, who ever did anything worth while. In his early years, when de Maupassant, Zola, Daudet, were alive, he was ignored; everything was done to keep him down: the Académie Française went so far as to give him a prize. But times have changed; Anatole France is acclaimed all over the world; everybody quotes him, and those

who cannot quote him quote his name; he is above criticism. This would be very bad for him if he were not also above adulation. People dare not say the things which should be obvious: that he repeats himself; that he is sentimental; that his novels are, from the point of view of French technique, incoherent; that, as expressed by his characters, his conception of love is rather disgusting; in fact, they take all the humanity out of him by endowing him with all the graces; they erect to him a statue which represents him just about as much as the sort of statue they occasionally put up to some highly respectable politician whom they depict stark naked, and beautiful as a young *discobolus*.

The reason probably is that it is not enough to understand Anatole France; one also has to understand the French, the gay, sensual, garrulous French of the Middle Ages, the gay, sensual, courteous French of the seventeenth century, the gay, sensual, cynical French of Voltairian times, and the

sensual, cynical French of to-day. Anatole France is all these, a sort of historical congress of French epochs, a retrospective exhibition of French mentalities. That perhaps explains the confusion which reigns in the minds of a great many people as to his alleged evolution from reaction to red socialism, a confusion so great that it seems to have touched even Mr Georg Brandes.

It is not wonderful that Anatole France should be so representative, for he is a provincial by extraction, a Parisian by birth and environment. The whole of his biography is revealed in his books, so it is enough to say that he was born in 1844, in the Quarter (that was inevitable), that he grew up in his father's old bookshop near the quays of the Seine, listening, as he grew up, sometimes to the talk of republicans, for those were the days of the Second Empire, much more often to that of elegant half-worldling abbés and aristocrats, for his father was a pronounced Royalist and Catholic, as was also his mother. . . . Old books,

good talk, and the Seine lazily flowing under the plane-trees before there were steam trams. It is all very like Anatole France, like the four volumes of *Contemporary History* where the bookshop is the centre, like *Pierre Nozière* and *My Friend's Book*. Then little France (whose real name is Thibault) went to the Collège Stanislas to be brought up as a good Royalist child. But he did not do particularly well there, thus bearing out the legend of the prize boy. Notably he loafed. Anatole France in life has always loafed, which is natural enough in one who was born near bridges. Who would not loaf who has a flowing river to watch? It might be said that Anatole France has loafed through thirty-five volumes.

As he grew up he accomplished desultory tasks, he taught, he wrote articles for the papers; in 1868 he published his study of Alfred de Vigny; in 1873 and 1876 he gave us two volumes of verse, *Poèmes Dorés* and *Les Noces Corinthiennes*. Not very startling or attractive verse; however deep

Anatole France's poetic feeling, he has never approached greatness as a poet, perhaps because he was always too calm, too detached, because so seldom did his eye in fine frenzy roll. Only when at last, in 1879, he published his first work of creative prose, two longish stories, *Jocasta* and *The Famished Cat*, followed, two years later, by *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*, and in 1882 by *Les Désirs de Jean Servien*,[1] was born the Anatole France we know to-day.

I cannot lay too much stress upon that. Anatole France was potentially in 1881 what he is now. It has continually been suggested that, up to 1898 and the revival of the Dreyfus case, Anatole France was a reactionary, a clerical, an anti-democrat; that, somehow, in an unexplained manner, he underwent a change of heart and suddenly turned into a humanitarian socialist; and a few bold folk hinted, when *The Gods are Athirst* appeared in 1913, that Anatole

[1] The title is given in English if the work has been translated, in French if it has not.

France, because he painted a dreadful and therefore not over-kind picture of the French Revolution, had reacted again. Briefly: the genius as weathercock. It has even been suggested that Anatole France wrote this reactionary book to make his peace with the respectable classes and to get into the Académie Française: the answer is that Anatole France was a member of that august body seventeen years before the publication of the book.

An examination of Anatole France's early works is vital to this question, notably of *Jocasta,* which has very little to do with the myth, for there is no Œdipus to murder his father and marry his mother; Anatole France is too modern for that. It is a queer, horrible story of the daughter of a shady middleman who, instead of marrying the young doctor she loves, weds a wealthy and sinister old Englishman, whom, to her knowledge, his valet murders. Fearing discovery and haunted by remorse (the Furies), emulating Jocasta, she hangs herself. This

story would hardly be worth mentioning save for its fine literary style and its high characterisation of Fellaire, the solemn, kindly, bumptious, sentimental middleman, of Haviland, the dry and methodical collector, if already here Anatole France were not at the age of thirty-five indicating what he would become. For he makes a journalist say in conclusion, after discussing the immortality of the soul and deciding that it is really a very complicated question: "Fortunately the Almighty is not a subject for an up-to-date par."

In the second story, *The Famished Cat*, where again we have the quite magical picture of Godet-Laterasse, the seedy revolutionary, and of the absurd people concerned with absurd arts at the Famished Cat tavern, we find another incarnation of the future Anatole France: the sculptor Labanne, lazy, ironic, who moralises on art rather as will Choulette in *The Red Lily*, fifteen years later. But it is in *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard* that Anatole France

most clearly indicates his own future. This is just the straggling story of Bonnard, the old professor, who observes the world, interested in women, Benedictine chronicles, the Arc de Triomphe, cats and the love affairs of fourteenth-century queens. The old gentleman watches over the granddaughter of one whom he loved but never married. He behaves quite quixotically, protects her against a schoolmistress who ill treats her; at last he kidnaps her to make her happy, and all ends well in spite of a little tragedy when the girl marries and old Bonnard sells his books to give her a dowry. It is all most incoherent, and one never quite knows what Sylvestre Bonnard's crime was; it may be the abduction (for old Bonnard, learned in the law of the sixth century, knows nothing of the Code Napoleon), or it may be, which is much more likely, that when he sells his books there are some he cannot bear to part with, even to afford his ward a dowry, and that he goes by night now and then to steal a few of them

from the pile. The whole story is full of charm, and Mr Georg Brandes is unjust when he describes it as a simple tale. It is much more than that: it singularly reveals Anatole France himself, for here we have a man aged thirty-six writing as a kindly, rather cynical, faintly ironic old gentleman, fond of the classics and of humanity. Children make him sentimental; he lectures his cat on immortal truth. He says: "I have always preferred the folly of passion to the wisdom of indifference." And that is true, only one feels that he loves best the folly of passion when it afflicts others. The book ends on a melancholic note, which is perhaps not so melancholic as it seems, for it brings out life passing by, all golden and bloody, as an old, old ship with a sumptuous figure-head, with ragged silken sails, carrying the embalmed corpses of those who first signed on, and their own sons growing up, full of sap, their thick hair streaming in the wind. Already in this book Anatole France is gentle. He is remorseful because "he has made

fun of an unhappy man" ; he is full of pity for a beggar-boy who will not accept a bit of gingerbread, and says: "He dares not touch it: in virtue of precocious experience he does not believe in happiness." He states a general theory: the time that God gives each one of us is as a precious fabric which we embroider as well as we may. This man of thirty-six is already old; he has laid his hand on the head of man as if he were a little child, and said: "Creature that thinkest to find eternity in the intensity of thy sufferings, in their permanence, in the impossibility of thy loves, and the greatness of thy charms; oh, little creature on this blind world, I, old man, old God, who have seen so many worlds like this one busily spinning, let me beg thee be not so urgent, so hot, so young. For I am old, old as truth, and I know the shortness of thy pains."

Who is Sylvestre Bonnard? Sylvestre Bonnard is Bergeret, is Coignard, is Brotteaux, he is the first of all those nice old gentlemen who pass through the pages of

Anatole France. He has never changed; he was born like a young rat in a book-case, and so he remained. Those old gentlemen believe in service, resignation; they are tolerant and indulgent, and are always ready to say when the time comes, to any God you prefer, for they don't mind: "*Et nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine.*"

The philosophical humanitarian who was to defend Dreyfus existed, then, in 1881; the subsidiary motives existed too in those years. For instance, in *My Friend's Book* (1885) the small boy says: "I saw my father, my mother and the maid as very gentle giants who had witnessed the birth of the world, immutable, everlasting, unique of their kind." That is exactly what the little dog, Riquet, thinks of man in general and what Anatole France perfidiously allows us to conclude man has always thought of God. Already he is cynical, and yet smiling, for he says: "I have faith no longer in my old friend, life: yet I still love it." But there is in this book a more important indica-

tion of the man to come; it is not only the alleged Socialist of 1898 that already exists, but the passionate pagan of 1914. In *My Friend's Book* he takes a little girl to a Punch and Judy show. Punch kills the devil, and Pierre Nozière (Anatole France) remarks: "The devil dead, good-bye sin. Maybe beauty, this ally of the devil, will vanish with him. Maybe we shall not again see the flowers that intoxicate and the eyes that slay." Any student of Anatole France will realise that in 1885 the author was already expressing what he would state more fully in 1914 in *The Revolt of the Angels*—namely, his fear and hatred of ascetic, beauty-hating, death-desirous Christianity.

And there is more: forgive me if I paint the lily a little, but others have painted it and in colours which displease me. The alleged reactionary of *The Gods are Athirst*, the man who was supposed to have gone back in 1914 upon the humanitarian and republican sentiments of the Dreyfus period, that man was, in 1882, in *Les Désirs de Jean Servien*

(a thoroughly second-rate novelette), painting an absurd revolutionary. The Commune reigns; he shows the hero the people rioting in the Luxembourg Gardens, and says: "M. Servien, look upon this scene and never forget it: here is a free people. *Indeed the citizens were walking upon the grass, plucking flowers in the beds, and breaking off the branches of the trees.*" Anatole France had in those days few illusions as to the behaviour of free peoples! And again in the short stories which make up *Mother of Pearl* (1892) one is oppressed by Anatole France's hatred of the revolutionaries, their brute ignorance, vanity, stupidity, their mean revengefulness, and their silly imitation of Roman attitudes.

Anatole France is what he was, and if he seems to have changed now and then, or to have been inconsistent, it is because he is a developed human being, a rare bird. He has not cut out his views as with a stencil; they are fluid, they overlap, and he can hold simultaneously two entirely divergent views. I submit that any man of

high intellectual development tends to hold two views upon one topic. One view is that of his instinct, the other is that of his reason. In the case of Anatole France the instinct is always hedonistic; he is a pagan; he loves Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, and even the Catholic Church, for their beauty; he is fond of all the good things of the world, beautiful women, flowers, sweetmeats; of all the fine, disdainful aristocratic ideas of the artists and the philosophers. . . . But there is what may be called his social conscience, which is utilitarian and Socialistic. That conscience tells him that however much beauty he may extract from it, this world, filled with wars, with cruelties, with factories, with ugly houses and ugly clothes, with mean prejudices, is a world for which he is responsible because he is a man. The dream of that ugly world will not let him sleep easily upon his rose-decked couch. There is the conflict which has puzzled so many of his readers; sometimes an Epicurean, at other times a

sort of Lloyd Georgeite is apparent. This does not mean that Anatole France is throwing over any ideas; he is merely being more or less influenced by one side of his own self. His love of humanity has always made it difficult for him to enjoy the fruit he raised to his mouth if it occurred to him just then that other mouths might go hungry.

II

SATIRIST AND CRITIC

IF Anatole France is to be remembered—that is, for a while, which is perhaps all a man can hope—it will be as a critic and as a satirist. Whether he will be remembered longer than his contemporaries, Tolstoy or Mr Shaw, I do not know. Though he has delighted us, the race of delights is short and pleasures have mutable faces; he may share the fate of Flaubert, who is menaced; of de Maupassant, who is going; or of Schiller, forgotten; of Walter Scott, reduced to a juvenile circulation; of Thackeray, staking all upon one novel; of Dickens, surviving by the picturesque; of Tolstoy, convicted as a moralist; of Greeks uneasily staggering under the burden of illogical murder and absurd incest . . . I do not think that he will join the glorious band: Homer, Shakespeare, Molière. For

ANATOLE FRANCE

Anatole France has understood all things, but mainly in their details. He has made a mosaic, not a marble court; seated on Olympus, his eyes have been too keen, and he has seen men too clearly, man not enough. But still he is, I suppose, assured of his line in any biographical dictionary that may be printed in the year 3000, and that is a good deal. I like to think of that entry in the *Cyclopædia of Literature* (published by the International Government Press; price, seven days labour bonds, net). It runs something like this:

FRANCE (Anatole). Pen-name of Jacques Anatole Thibault. French writer, b. 1844. d. . Satirist and critic. Some of his work has merit as reflecting the faintly enlightened views of an observer living in barbarous times.

Anatole France is the only living satirist. He has actually no rivals; there are men such as Messrs Max Beerbohm, Hansi, Mirbeau, Hector Munro, F. P. Dunne, who

have a glimmering of what satire means; Mr Wells would have more than a glimmering if, unfortunately, he did not hold deep convictions about right and wrong, a weakness to which, in spite of all appearances, Mr Shaw also succumbs; but Anatole France alone upholds the ancient tradition of Voltaire, of Defoe and Swift. His satire is always effective because it is always light, always pointed and always smiling. He has none of the bitterness of Swift and therefore he is the truer cynic, for true cynicism is not fierce; it is always genial. He never labours a point; he states, presents the contrasts between, for instance, what a rich man may do as opposed to a poor one, and then passes on, laughing, Pan-like dancing, with perhaps a tear or two in his laughter.

Though almost every book he has written is satirical in intent, or at least in incident, five volumes are satire pure and simple; as I have no space to analyse all his works, these five representatives must

expound him. They are *Penguin Island* and the four volumes of *Contemporary History* (*The Elm Tree on the Mall, The Wickerwork Woman, L'Anneau d'Améthyste, Monsieur Bergeret à Paris*). They overlap a little, but the spirit which informs them is different. *Penguin Island* is broad, applicable to the whole history of man, while the other four volumes cover rather the modern irregularities of the French State. For this reason, *Penguin Island* is a bigger and a finer thing; indeed it is probably the biggest thing Anatole France has done, because, dealing as it does with the earliest superstitions of man, his faith in gods and in God, with the rise of feudalism, the roots of democracy, war, the birth of art, the action and reaction of parties, it has a sweep so large that it envelops even ages now in the womb of time. It is a terrible book, not so much because it is the thinly veiled history of the French people—that is to say, the story of follies, miseries and crimes (the story of any other imperial people)—but

because at the end Anatole France reaches forth into the future. And what he sees is a development of capitalism by the side of which modern capitalism is as a puling child; he summarises in a phrase a period of greater New York: "the houses were never high enough." He sees the masses rising, revolution, the break-up of the social system, the return of pastoralism, man once more nomadic . . . towns forming . . . another aristocracy . . . Parliaments . . . industry and capitalism fastening upon the world, and again the houses never high enough. . . . That is a vision of horror, of a world unchanging, unchangeable, of man as a dog ever returning to his own vomit. I should like to pursue the dream further, to the death of the sun, when the earth shall grow cold and a terrible term be brought to the stupidity of man; he shall once more be a fearful brute hiding in a cave, until at last, upon his cold and dying globe, among settling mists, he shall yield up the last spark of a misused life. . . .

Anatole France is certainly wrong, for no barbarism which the world has ever known ever was so barbarous as the barbarism that went before. If the life of man describes a curve, this is not a circle; he does not interminably return to the same point; rather the curve is a cycloid, ever bending back upon itself and yet slowly moving onwards towards the unknown goal. Anatole France does not, I think, quite deny that, but he is not over-fond of what he calls idle speculation: where his knowledge stops he is inclined to say: "After all, what does it matter to Sirius?"

The island where the penguins lived was evangelised by St Mael, who quite naïvely relates how he navigated to its shores in a stone trough. God served him as rudder and sail. It would have been all right if the saint had not been short-sighted, but he took the penguins for men and baptized them, which gave rise to great trouble in heaven and a wonderful ecclesiastical debate. For St Patrick said that baptism could not

avail birds; St Damasius said it could, for Mael was competent; St Guenolé said it could not, because penguins were not conceived in sin; St Augustine thought it could if given in proper form. This caused much ill feeling in Paradise; Tertullian grew quite vicious and said he was sorry that the penguins had no soul, as thus they could not go to hell. The intervention of the Almighty was hailed with unanimous cheers, which St Augustine backed up by begging Him not to give the penguins a soul because, as they could not keep the law, they would burn in hell "in virtue of God's adorable decrees." Upon this the disturbance turned to scandal, and to end it the penguins were turned into men.

Then the troubles of the once happy birds began. They were clad and modesty was born. Property arose, and murder. The Catholic Devil had a hand in this and remarked that the murderers were creating rights, constituting property, laying the bases of civilisation, of society and the State.

He added that the source of property is force. Later a state formed and the poor only were taxed because they could not resist, and because there were more of them. A freebooter arose: he became a king. His armies went to war and were beloved, for they won. Art appeared; Margaritone foresaw the decadence of ecclesiastical art and, in a horrid dream, something like post-impressionism. The priest, Marbode, visited Virgil in hell; the Latin poet remarked that Dante was rather a bore and that Christ was the god of barbarism. Then history unrolls. There is a revolution (obviously 1789); Trinco (Napoleon) appears and a loyal penguin states that glory cannot cost too much. Modern times give Anatole France a yet greater chance, for he takes us to New Atlantis (America), where commercial wars are executed on contract, because a business people must have a policy of conquest; the European War of 1914, if one dives deep under the crust of patriotism, sounds very like the war of New Atlantis against Third

Zealand "where they killed two-thirds of the inhabitants to compel the remaining third to buy from New Atlantis umbrellas and braces." Plutocracy. Socialism. Royalist agitations, supported by the leaders of the army, the wineshops, the newsboys, the police and the courtesans. All through this section runs the Pyrot case. A traitor (Dreyfus) sold ninety thousand bundles of hay to the foreigner—that is to say, he did not sell them, for they did not exist. Yet General Panther says: "Evidently Pyrot stole them, so all we have to do is to prove it." To which another General replies: "Arrest Pyrot. Find some evidence; the law demands it."

Then the agitation, difficult because the people like to believe in guilt and are too stupid to doubt. Still no evidence, and evidence manufactured. Here Anatole France puts into the General's mouth beautiful phrases: "Don't have evidence; it makes the case less clear"; and: "It may be better to have no evidence, but still if

you must have some, trumped-up evidence is better than the truth, for it is made to order." And so on through popular agitations, Royalist manœuvres, Boulangism, the renaissance of Catholicism (supported by Jewish money), political adultery, the rule of gold, until we come to the time when houses are never high enough. . . .

This is not the satire of Englishmen. It has not the truculence of Defoe's *A Short Way with Dissenters*; nor does it state the author's view as does any one of Mr Shaw's plays; nor is it so veiled as *Gulliver's Travels*. All this is together elusive and obvious; it aims at showing the reader what lies under history, man in the soldier's coat, his meanness, his greed, his lust for power, and the horrible, crusted stupidity to which alone are traceable his crimes.

I should not advise any Englishman who is not conversant with French history to read *Penguin Island*, but I should not advise any Englishman at all to read the four volumes of *Contemporary History* unless he

has lived in France for the last fifteen years and mixed in every kind of French society. He will find in those books droll stories, and droll incidents; he will see that the author is getting at something, but that is all. For those volumes do not deal with the big outer movements which one can watch from the columns of *The Times*. They are concerned with the mysteries inside French politics, paralleled here by the "Confederates," the Marconi case, the theft of the crown jewels at Dublin, the secret history of the rebellion of the officers at the Curragh. No Frenchman would understand a book dealing with those things, so it is too much to expect an Englishman to understand *Contemporary History*. The circumstances that led to the writing of these books are simple enough. The Dreyfus case was used as a platform for clerical, Royalist and militarist agitation. The Government set to work to break the Church and broke it (after which the Church mended itself and became stronger than ever); the Nationalist revival took place, and

since that time there has been much manœuvring, some intended to restore the Bourbons and quite ridiculous, some of it designed to gain well-paid posts for reactionaries, and that one much in earnest. The interesting parts of the four books are the commentaries of M. Bergeret, a university professor in a little town, who, I need hardly say, is (just like Sylvestre Bonnard, Coignard, Trublet, Brotteaux) Anatole France himself. The four books, published between 1897 and 1901, more or less cover that period. In *The Elm Tree on the Mall* unfolds, with local politics, the life of Bergeret, married to a shrew, unloved of his daughters, disliked by most people because he thinks for himself, which amounts to saying that he does not think like anybody else. Round him eddy representative characters, the Abbé Guitrel, who wants to be a bishop and is proceeding towards the episcopate half by apostolic mansuetude, half by way of Ignatius of Loyola; Worms-Clavelin, the *préfet* (chief of the local executive), who is a Jew, a Freemason, a

Conservative Catholic, an advanced Republican, a Socialist, a Royalist and a few other things necessary to the maintenance of his post; his wife is friendly to Guitrel because the Abbé makes her feel French (she was born Noemi Coblenz) and because she "likes to protect one of those tonsured heads charged for eighteen centuries with the excommunication and extermination of the circumcised." There is General de Chalmot, a soldier, who thinks that if you destroy belief you ruin the military spirit, because you take away the hope of another life; there is Paillot's bookshop where Bergeret meets the county, the lawyers, the doctors, to talk of books, politics, actresses and their figures. . . .

Nothing in particular happens. Guitrel's bishopric is the leading string of the action; there is Madame Worms-Clavelin helping Guitrel, who finds her, at bargain prices, chasubles with which she covers her armchairs; there is a young girl, Claudine Deniseau, who, inspired by St Radegunde,

becomes a prophetess, indulges in healing, predicts frost and the return of the king; there is Worms-Clavelin, trying to keep the prophetess quiet, because so ancient a person as St Radegunde ought really not to cause a row in a country town. An old lady of eighty is murdered by her boy-lover, which causes Bergeret to remark that murder is quite natural and fortunate, for without evil one could not see beauty. Worms-Clavelin kisses Madame de Gromance on the shoulder, (a local custom); a senator promotes shady companies while his wife embroiders altar-cloths; and somehow the story ends with Guitrel very much out of the running for the episcopal stakes.

What matters in the book is Bergeret, sitting under the elm-tree on the Mall, or in the bookshop, thinking, talking, smiling at the comedy. Notable are his talks with Lantaigne, another candidate for the bishopric, and the type of the intellectual priest. Anatole France may detest the Catholic attitude, but he understands it admirably,

and when Lantaigne contends that one can have two opinions, one conscious and rationalistic, the other intuitive and theological, he makes a very fine case. For him, in the case of Joshua, celestial astronomy is not the astronomy of man, and in celestial mathematics, 3 + 3 may make nine, because we do not know all the properties of numbers. At other times Bergeret, who talks to anybody, tells the melancholic story of Napoleon III., who never managed to grant his foster-brother a small post in the civil service: "The Emperor was a charming fellow but, alas, he had no influence." And so the book wanders on with the opinions of Bergeret, happy, like Æsop, in the freedom of his mind, in spite of the narrowness of his home, conscious that the State is honoured so long as it taxes the poor, and that the republic is easiest to live under because it does not govern much, that revolutions help none save the flourishing and the ambitious. It would all be profoundly pessimistic if it were not always genial.

One feels sure that if Bergeret had an agreeable wife, a good cook, and a volume of Lucretius (Oh, Omar!), he would let the State do just what it liked.

The story continues in *The Wickerwork Woman*, with Bergeret working up his lecture in the worst room in his flat, where stands the wickerwork figure used for dress-making, symbolic of his unpleasant wife. He grumbles, and then considers the Romans. "They were not heroes, they preferred making roads, they only made war for business reasons." He thinks of soldiers and wonders whether the sergeant has a right to tell a conscript that his mother is a sow: he decides that the sergeant has this right, for without it there can be no hierarchy or discipline. Then the cook gives notice, and Guitrel goes to Paris while Bergeret talks to a tramp who says that when he was young he lost his pride because people made fun of him. . . .

The town is greatly upset because the prophetess cannot give the logarithm of

nine. (Another case of celestial mathematics?) Madame de Gromance passes, and Bergeret reflects that to see a pretty woman is a stroke of luck for an honest man. He is "grateful to her for dressing with art and discretion." But tragedy invades the Bergeret household, for Roux, a pupil, becomes the lover of Madame Bergeret . . . in circumstances which make it impossible for the professor to doubt his eyes. After a murderous moment Bergeret decides that this is all really very trifling, throws the wickerwork figure through the window, and goes out to talk to Paillot, the bookseller; he reflects vaguely on adultery and its meaninglessness. Guitrel and the archdeacon hold an earnest discussion on omelettes. Inspired by Marcus Aurelius, Bergeret concludes that the art of life is a benevolent contempt for man: all Anatole France is there. For him those lovers were chimpanzees, and he feels a little superior because he is "a meditative chimpanzee."

The conversations continue to develop. Fremont, inspector of fine arts, is " patriotic, even in art " ; Worms-Clavelin states that he loathes the Empire, but adds: " Still we make wine, grow corn, as under the emperor . . . we work on the Stock Exchange, eat, drink, make love as under the emperor." The upshot is: " Don't touch the machine, for it will be all the same whatever you do."

The execution of the murderer of the old lady enables Bergeret to state his views, which are, as usual, exceedingly unpopular, for he will not have it that the murderer was a degenerate: had not Mithridates a double row of teeth ? Nor shall tattooing prove the crime, for are not fashionable travellers tattooed ? And then he wanders off on the fiction of the aristocratic type in woman, which is entirely derived from the smart shopgirl and the plebeian actress. The shady senator is arrested, but released, says his wife, owing to the intervention of the Almighty. Meanwhile Bergeret refuses to speak to his unfaithful wife, which causes

great trouble in the house, because the cook, disliking the goings-on, gives notice again; the new cook can make only one kind of soup, which is very annoying. And so the book rambles on until Madame Bergeret, unable to bear dumb disdain, leaves with her two daughters.

Before leaving she has disgraced herself again with Lacarelle, "the Gaul," who only made love to her because his moustache was so long that this was expected of him. The Dreyfus case is beginning to bubble, and Guitrel, friendly to the *préfet*, finds it difficult to defend the Jews, except "the converted ones who have done a lot for the Church by their wealth." Long story of Saint Austregisile, and of the Virgin's miraculous foot. Honorinè, the visionary, has a miraculous trance, and then retires into a bush to make love to a tramp. Fat and beautiful Madame de Bonmont entertains Guitrel. History of the rise of this county family, late Nathan, and of Madame de Bonmont's love-making with Raoul, duellist

and gambler, illustrious because he fought a Jew who had in a café asked for the Army List and thereby outraged the French flag. As the agitation progresses, the loyal populace sacks the shop of Meyer, the bootmaker, and retires, having struck a good blow for their country. In these days Bergeret is happy, talking to Riquet, his dog, "a religious beast," thinking and talking of Hercules, whom he looks upon as a sort of boxer at a fair, and of the history of Spain. . . .

Little boys pass, shouting: "Down with Zola! . . ."

Bergeret is a Dreyfusist. It does not make him any more popular than he became when he said that Joan of Arc was only a military mascot. Bergeret wistfully begins to desire Madame de Gromance, but knows that he has no chance; so he returns to his thoughts and to the all-pervading Dreyfus case, realising that the crowd cannot reason, that "it holds with established error." Young de Bonmont meanwhile sends his beautiful mother to see a most glad-eyed

Cabinet minister who has power to make Guitrel a bishop, because if Guitrel is made a bishop he can induce the local duke to invite young de Bonmont to the hunt. One is sorry for Madame de Bonmont, so fat and so innocent, but one does not feel sorry when young Dellion, who is for the time being favoured of Madame de Gromance, enlists her influence on the side of Guitrel, and while she is putting on her stays discusses the future of the bishopric. The talk veers to fashions, and while she attaches her suspenders Madame de Gromance argues whether his mother, Madame Dellion, was truly virtuous. Meanwhile Madame Worms-Clavelin, also supporting Guitrel, makes—well, let us say, great concessions to the secretary of the Cabinet minister, in the cause of chasubles at bargain prices and of good government. . . .

Bergeret continues to attack most things: antisemitism, because he is not big enough to hate ninety thousand people; nationality, because there is no such thing, for the

alleged French are only Gauls, Iberians, Celts, Romans, Franks and Saracens. Guitrel, made a bishop, is broken for attacking the Government, while poor Madame de Bonmont leaves her amethyst ring on Raoul's bedroom mantelpiece.

In the last volume, Bergeret, now a professor in Paris, reflects on the quality of meat, the soul of dogs, and the essence of heroism. Panneton de la Barge delivers a passionate speech on the army which is " the consolation of the present and the hope of the future," and ends by enlisting Bergeret's influence to get his son out of two years' military service. Madame de Bonmont has now fallen into the arms of Lacrisse, secretary of the Royalist group, for she wishes to save France. Lacrisse's chief occupation is to coach generals in evidence to be used at the Dreyfus trial. Conspiracy. A letter from the Pretender; great sensation which leads to the conquest of Lacrisse, for Madame de Bonmont gives him " a historic embrace." He then compels her reluctantly to subscribe

to the funds. Royalist fête. And Panneton begins to cook the local elections with the help of Madame de Gromance: he finds that the one place where they can talk politics is a flat furnished with a graduated series of sofas.

Meanwhile Bergeret indulges in charity to a beggar called Clopinel, and then remarks: "I have done wrong, I have given alms . . . I have tasted the shameful joy of abasing my fellow-man, I have signed the odious pact which preserves strength for the strong, weakness for the weak. I have sold to my brother fraternity at short weight. . . . I have been tempted. Oh, seducer! Oh dangerous Clopinel! Delicious Clopinel. . . ."

Slump in Royalist plots, arrests. Lacrisse stands for the town council as a republican Liberal, with the help of Father Adéodat, who will let him be a republican in public if only he will be a true man in committee. And the Contemporary History ends at a Royalist dinner-party, on memories of a

riot, the triumph of Mr Loubet, who triumphed just because he happened to be there; this is the downfall of reactionary and clerical hopes, but Madame de Gromance gives up to Dellion her hospitable heart. . . .

It all sounds rather cruel, and there are touches, such as Lacrisse coaching Generals in the evidence they will deliver against Dreyfus, such as the description of M. de la Barge trying to get his son out of military service after proclaiming that the army is the ideal of his soul, which provoke in the reader just what Anatole France wants: not laughter, but an ironic, lingering, vinegary smile. Time after time, in every one of his books he obtains this effect; it is the effect of sharp contrast, of suddenness; it recalls a page of Machiavelli who, after describing how an Italian tyrant had one of his ministers sawn in half, alive, in the market-place, goes on: "But to return to more important things . . ."

That produces a shock, and when

applied to irony this is an effect still more powerful than when it is applied to fiction, as, for instance, in Ambrose Bierce's *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*. But the irony is not artificial: it is the sort of irony given to those who walk the world with their eyes open. It inspires the feeling of amusement which invaded a few of us during the great European War, when we read in the newspapers articles about Russian culture, and remembered what the same newspapers used to say about the Bear. I could not help smiling at our attitude to the sausage-eaters when recalling how completely we had forgotten the frog-eaters and candle-eaters of times gone by. Very likely, though the war roused him to action in defence of ancient French culture, Anatole France chuckled over the intimate friendship between France and England, which, in 1898, at the time of Fashoda, and in 1899, at the time of the Boer War, was such an intimate hatred. He would have chuckled still more had he known that a patriotic English inn-

keeper had changed the name of his tavern from " The King of Prussia " to " The Czar's Head." For history has staying power, and one wonders a little whether, as generations pass, " The Czar's Head " may not have to turn into " The Roosevelt Arms," " The Garibaldi," or perhaps one day into " The Chung Ling Soo . . ."

But ironic as it all is, it is very living. This should strike nobody as extraordinary, for life is most ironic: it would be quite intolerable to some of us if it were not. But this is worth saying because a great many other satirists—Swift, Rabelais, Cervantes — obtain most of their effects by distortion. Anatole France obtains his by bringing out the essential incongruity of life: funerals passing under the windows of the Ritz where there is a smart luncheon-party, sermons bidding us love our enemies while newsboys shout casualty lists; life is full of it. That is why the archdeacon and another cleric hold, in the midst of a theological crisis, that earnest argument about

omelettes. Life and people are like that, and there is nothing at all distorted in the diplomatic, furry, soft-spoken priests who . . . well, let us say, do not discourage their fair penitents from committing adultery with powerful republicans, provided this serves a good cause. After all Judith . . . and Jael, and all that. And it does not seem monstrous that the new bishop should be selected while Madame de Gromance does up her suspenders, for it is quite conceivable that lovers should now and then, at intervals, talk politics.

And he is fair. He is not fair like Byron, who hated most people and disliked the others, but because he can see oddity and occasionally beastliness in the people of whom he approves. He is for the Jews in this Dreyfus quarrel, but that does not make him anti-Christian; he is as impartial in his attacks as a mosquito. Indeed a great many Jews wish they had been saved from their friend, for pictures such as that of Madame Worms-Clavelin and her husband,

of Madame de Bonmont, that most Christian of Jewesses, anxious to forget the tent of hides, remembering in the most sacred (and even most amorous) moments that there is such a thing as a Stock Exchange, are not always kind.

But, kind or unkind, the satire is never laid on thickly. Not once does Anatole France suggest that Mademoiselle Deniseau is a sham prophetess: no, that would be clumsy; she merely cannot give the logarithm of nine. . . .

In those four books modern French society stands forth quite stark, with a rather decayed charm, a naïveté born from an excess of complexity. Anatole France strips it of all its gewgaws, patriotism, faith, morality: of all its little affectations; . . . and then, having exposed it, he consents to love it because his satire rests on his philosophy. That philosophy, with which I deal further on, is enunciated in every volume by the nice old gentlemen who embody him, Bonnard, Bergeret and the others: irony

and pity; despise man but love him, see his weakness and yet hope; he may not be immortal, yet he is eternal, indestructible as all matter; and though he be no more than a mite in cheese yet he is the expression of life, the soul of beauty, the one thing in the world which is holy. For Anatole France is sweet and pitiful. All through his works we feel that, and in none so much as in a little story, *Crainquebille*. This is the simple tale of an old hawker who was run in for not moving on, just because he was waiting for sixpence owed to him for vegetables. The policeman trumped up against him a charge of having shouted "Down with the Peelers!" When he comes out of gaol Crainquebille is ostracised; that makes him quarrelsome; then, having no friends, he drinks; becoming drunken, he loses his customers and sinks deeper and deeper into poverty. And the terrible indictment of the law that makes criminals by listening to the strong and flouting the poor, ends on the picture of old Crainquebille, forlorn, degraded and starving,

going up to a policeman and shouting: "Down with the Peelers!" so as to get a night's lodging in the cells. But, irony of ironies, this policeman shrugs his shoulders, and walks away.

It would not be right to end this chapter without saying a few words about Anatole France in his more literal rôle of critic. He has done an immense amount of literary criticism in *Le Temps* and in scattered articles, most of which have been collected in the four volumes of *On Life and Letters* and in *Le Génie Latin*. He is sympathetic and kindly in the extreme when dealing with the work of young men, particularly if they are scholars, if they are interested in the things he loves, mediævalism, sculpture, history, etc., and he will forgive a great deal to good intentions, but when he does not like a book Anatole France is a terrible reviewer, so terrible a reviewer that I trust this little monograph will not fall into his hands. Ignoring then the gentler side of him, I will reproduce two extracts from his

criticisms. The first is from a review of Georges Ohnet's book, entitled *Will*. Mr Georges Ohnet, as I suppose everybody knows, has for a long time enjoyed great vogue in France for, have no illusions about it, the French are no more literary than we are and have a passion for stories of moated granges, immaculate officers (comparatively chaste), remorseful women who sacrifice their beauty for the ideal, and all that sort of thing; with a little arrangement, the sentimental-heroic novels of Mrs Barclay, and the sentimental-religious novels of Mr Hall Caine would have in France a good circulation. In fact, the sensuous religiosity of Mr Hall Caine enjoys in France quite adequate popularity. And here is what Anatole France says of this kind of novel, *Will*, as published by Mr Georges Ohnet:

"The title is a whole philosophy. *Will*, that is what speaks to the heart and mind. *Will* by Georges Ohnet! How one feels the man of principle who has never doubted! *Will* by Georges Ohnet, 73rd edition! What

a proof of the power of the will! Locke did not believe that the world was free. But his *Essay on the Human Understanding* did not reach seventy-three editions in a single morning. Here we have Locke victoriously refuted! The will is not an illusion, for Mr Georges Ohnet has willed to have seventy-three editions, and he has achieved them."

Anatole France, after this amiable beginning, remarks that Mr Georges Ohnet's notions are displeasing, that his style is ungraceful; he quotes him, and the result is quite ghastly. And he ends on words which rescue the reader from doubt:

"There is not a page, not a line, not a word, not a syllable of that book which has not shocked, saddened, and offended me. I was disposed to weep over it with all the muses for company."

Another review, that of Zola's book, *The Dream*, I cannot resist mentioning. The book is not very well known in England,

which is a pity, as it might please the worshippers of the latter-day Swan of Avon. It is pure. Anatole France is aware of that, for he wickedly heads his review: "Mr Zola's Purity." As it certainly was not Zola's habit to be pure, surprise at the accident was legitimate. And so Anatole France writes:

"If in order to be poetic, graceful, and touching, it were enough to resolve, Mr Zola would certainly be at the present moment the most graceful, the most poetic, the most winged, and the most uplifted among novelists . . . he espouses chastity and thus affords us the most edifying example. One can only regret that he celebrates this mystic alliance with too much noise and uproar. . . ."

Anatole France analyses the tale of the beautiful heroine, in her saintly cathedral town, and adds: "Zinc factories and flat irons occupy too much space in Mr Zola's soul." He then convicts Zola of gross ignorance of the period he describes, remarks

casually: "Saint Joseph's lily becomes in his hand an instrument for advertisement," and, alluding to his previous works, sums up: "I prefer Mr Zola on all fours to Mr Zola winged."

III

PHILOSOPHER AND THEOLOGIAN

LIKE many agnostics, Anatole France is more interested in religion than is many a believer. Like those old encyclopædists of the eighteenth century, he is always crushing the infamous one, which the faithful generally support because assured that the so-called infamous one cannot be crushed. And that infamous one is not only the Catholic religion but religion itself. I do not want to raise an argument as to what is religion: in the sense in which Anatole France attacks it it is a precise faith in some creative and conscious spirit which manifests itself, not only in this world, but in some conceptive other world. Of that Anatole France will hear nothing. He can do without it; he is strong enough to stand alone, and to meet death "as one about to seek a great perhaps." He needs no prop,

and he would smile at a letter I received a little while ago from a devout Catholic who urged me to draw on "the strength and consolation which streamed from that little hill near Jerusalem, two thousand years ago, and now flows from the slope that rises by the side of the yellow waters of the Tiber." Anatole France sees the poetry of this conception, but though he sees the idea as poetic he does not see the statement as true. For him religion or faith is cowardice; it is the cry of man who dares not die, and in every one of his books he has used the most cunning methods to express his feeling.

One of the most notable ways has been to express the ideas of men through the mouth of Riquet, the dog.[1] For the dog, as Anatole France said in another place, is a religious beast, and here are some of the thoughts which pass through its brain:

"My master warms me when I lie behind

[1] In *Monsieur Bergeret à Paris*, and in the story entitled *Riquet*.

him in his armchair; that is because he is a god." ("The Lord will provide.") "In my master's voice are many vain sounds. It is difficult and necessary to define the thought of the master." (Catholic exegesis of the Bible.) "I love my master, Bergeret, because he is terrible and powerful." (Jewish worship of Jehovah.) And the little black dog prays:

"Oh, my master, Bergeret, God of Slaughter, I worship thee! Hail, oh God of wrath! Hail, oh bountiful God! I lie at thy feet, I lick thy hand. Thou art great and beautiful when at the laden board thou devourest abundant meats. Thou art great and beautiful when, from a thin strip of wood causing flame to spring, thou dost of night make day. . . ."

Here indeed in the old professor who can whip Riquet is the God of Sabaoth, the God of Battles; in the professor with the carving knife is He who multiplied the fishes and the loaves. And I need not labour that when Bergeret strikes a match it is very wonderful: so was Genesis and the making of the sun. . . .

For his aggressive, childish superstitions, for his puerile desire to find an unnatural explanation to what he does not understand, Anatole France might despise man, yet he loves him. He finds charm in hierophantic absurdity; he feels the poetry of the little hill. And he goes further: he feels the poetry even of the Middle Ages, though it was a period of bestial and ungraceful ignorance, raping knights, robber troubadours and fine ladies who never changed their underclothing; he loves historic truth as well as the highfalutin nonsense of Amadis of Gaul. For Amadis has a picaresque air. In his book, *The Well of St Clare* notably, are several stories supposed to be told by a Siennese priest. There is that of Saint Satyr, out of whose tomb came a multitude of mists, each one of which was a woman. They floated in the darkling air; through their light tunics shone their light bodies. The clerics had hunted them into the tomb of the saint who was accepted of God the Christ, because

the goat worshipped in his own fashion. (Anatole France hints that all religions have the same root and that one worshipper is as good as another; he has written another story on these lines, *Amycus and Célestin.*) The tomb is opened and the heart of the priest who saw the vision is in most mediæval style torn out by the ghosts of hags. In another story, *The Security*, the Virgin stands bail for a year for a debt, and leads the merchant's barque back in time to redeem her, because he believed in her; there are other queer stories, such as *The Lady of Verona*, who so loved her body that she begged Satan to save it; such as *The Mystery of the Blood*, where a saint cheers a criminal whose blood falls upon her gown. She says: "Take not from me my purple and my perfumes." In all these stories he shows how charmed he is by this childish mediævalism. And yet he does not espouse it, for in the *Opinions of Jérome Coignard* he says: "All those stories of Satanic fornication are disgusting dreams, and it is a shame that Jesuits and

Dominicans should have made them up into treatises."

His theology is usually intermingled with his philosophy. In the story called *Komm l'Atrébate* (in *Clio*) the warrior believes that the same moon does not shine over Rome and over Gaul, because Rome is so far away; in *La Muiron* (in *Clio*) Buonaparte expounds his theory of government by faith: "The right to deny God is granted to a learned man shut up in his study, not to a leader of peoples whose power over the vulgar rests upon his community with their ideas. To govern men one must think like them on all great questions and allow oneself to be carried by public opinion."

Anatole France wishes to govern no man, and to be governed of no man. He is the most anarchistic of Socialists. And how could he feel otherwise if indeed he be Coignard, who "despised man tenderly," who thought that "on earth one cannot help sinning"? The Abbé Coignard, in 1893, was full of cynical contempt for

democracy, of disbelief in the importance of forms of government, and in the value of change; yet Coignard hated prisons and armies; he thought all war hateful, except civil war; for him glory, nobility, honour were words; glory, notably, was accident; modesty was Calvinism; he thought that there was a pure and an impure, but heaven alone knew which was which. . . . All that is the Francian philosophy mixed in with the Francian religion: doubts and smiles.

But now and then, when he is annoyed by the externals of Christianity, Anatole France becomes more militant. He has written (in *Mother of Pearl*) a story entitled *The Procurator of Judæa*, which ranks with the finest of de Maupassant's, and is deeper in intention than anything de Maupassant ever wrote. A generation after the Crucifixion, Pilate, then taking the waters for gout in Northern Italy, meets an old friend who was once at Jerusalem. They talk of horses, of the policy of Vitellius, of the

waters, of the things that would interest Roman gentlemen, and, little by little, they come to talk of those silly, noisy, obstinate Jews who used to raise such wrangles and such schisms in Jerusalem. And they talk of Mary Magdalene, in her pre-scriptural days: "By the light of a smoky little lamp, on a wretched carpet she danced, raising her arms to strike the cymbals. Her back arched, her head thrown back, as if drawn down by the heavy weight of her ruddy hair, her eyes drowned in lust, ardent and languishing, she would have caused Cleopatra herself to blush for envy. . . ." They sigh, for Magdalene was very beautiful and seductive (in her pre-scriptural days). Then the friend recalls that she followed "a young Galilean thaumaturge who was crucified," says the friend, "for I don't know what crime." Pontius Pilate thinks for a long time; crucifixion was so commonplace in those days. After a while he says: "Jesus? Jesus of Nazareth? No, I don't remember him."

I know that many who read this will charge Anatole France with blasphemy. Well, blasphemy has its uses: it parts the sheep from the goats; it impresses the waverers and drives such of them as are weak of faith into agnosticism, while it shocks the faithful and strengthens their militancy. The blasphemer may render a service to the faith. Blasphemy need not be ignorant; indeed, true blasphemy is possible only in the enlightened: the unenlightened find it easier to believe; it is so difficult to believe when one does not know. Now Anatole France does not know, and he is, so far as that goes, in the position of St Francis, but where he differs from St Francis is that he does not believe that which he does not know. (I am assuming that St Francis did believe, that he did more than want to believe.) For Anatole France understands perfectly well the Catholic attitude and its Christian variations; he has a full understanding of it, its simplicity, gaiety, charm, of its tender humanity, of the

beautiful Catholic sympathy with the weakness of man, with the feeble hands that cannot seize more than the hem of the seamless garment. He loves this Catholicism which he detests because, after all, while spreading among the people brute ignorance, infamous asceticism, prejudices and an intolerance resulting in a cruelty foreign to the tiger, it somehow, through the Dark Ages, kept burning the flame of the arts. The Catholicism of Anatole France is that of Cimabue, of Raphael, of Marot, of Shakespeare (no Protestant he), the Catholicism of those friars who pored over Greek texts, of those inspired workmen who painted stained glass, of the fine ladies with the pearl-braided hair who, with hands delicate as sprays of fern, embroidered chasubles, and, all of them, interposed a bulwark between the culture of man and the stinking men-at-arms. That Catholicism is the Catholicism of song and dance, the Catholicism of the juggler and the troubadour, not only the Catholicism of the stake but the Catholicism of

Merrie England before Calvin came to blow a black breath upon a world not yet made grey by the Galilean.[1]

It might be concluded that Anatole France is an atheist, but that is not correct; he has said too definitely that though man may not be immortal, he is eternal. He merely does not know whence we came nor whither we go, nor I think does he care much; he is merely a member of the band, Voltaire, Renan, Huxley, Spencer, Darwin, Haeckel (doubtful that one), who were not willing to believe without understanding, and yet agreed that there might be something in which to believe if one could understand it. Briefly, he is an agnostic. He refuses to make the slightly self-conscious effort which certain literary men, in England and in France, successfully make to accept the spiritual origin of miracles and such like matters. What is, is, and what may be, may

[1] Anatole France would hate our Puritan practices, such as the prohibition of billiards in hotels and of cricket in the parks on Sunday.

be: that is enough. But his theology is so intermingled with his human interests that at bottom he is a pagan; he loves beauty so well that he discovers it even in faith, and it is evident that he would have found much pleasure in the rites of the ancient Greeks. In his celebrated novel, *Thais*, he hails pagan beauty as he holds up for our contemptuous sympathy the sorrow of Paphnutius, the monk of Arsinoe. The monk set forth to redeem Thais, the courtesan; for her beauty and her soul he abandoned his cell and his hair shirt. She was unhappy and superstitious, and she feared the life to come; at his behest she turned to the Christian God. But Paphnutius burned himself with the torch he had lit: Thais assailed him in dream, and though he strove to fight his passion by solitude, by fasting, by becoming a stylite, he failed. In dream he dishonoured his soul, and at last, surrendering, he rushed to Thais, but found her dying and become a saint; doubt, fear and despair had compassed his downfall, and it was too.

late to love: he could be naught save a vampire.

The story is one of violent pageantry, of Alexandria crimson, purple and gold, of Alexandria dancing on the rosy wharves where great ships with brown sails unloaded silks and spices, Alexandria offering up to the old gods, Hermes of the secret smile and Aphrodite of the cup-like breasts, not the smoking holocausts of Jehovah, but honey and garlands of flowers. . . . And on the other side, quite near the sceptical, cynical, gay, intellectual Greeks, who for a pastime and as in a Chelsea drawing-room discussed man and God, the horrid state of the Christian anchorites, self-starved, self-flogged, verminous, sour, contemptuous of the beauty of the body, of learning. There is a bitter irony in the efforts of Paphnutius, the stylite, for as he sits upon his column as far as he can from man and as near as possible to God, his reputation as a saint waxes; round him there grows a town, Stylopolis, an ancestor of Lourdes; first of all come

shrines and convents, then traders, then a government, then banks, theatres . . . the rich, the sons of the rich . . . courtesans. He does not hate Paphnutius nor love him, for the monk was unfortunate, not guilty; gladly would he have torn out his heart and burnt it as an offering to God the Christ. His was a white, burning soul, but he had beyond a soul a body needing lightness, satisfaction. His flesh was weak, and it is pitiful rather than rejoicing that Anatole France sorrows for his error, when the monk sees Lucifer as "the serpent with golden wings which twisted round the tree of knowledge its azure coils formed of light and love," when he sees Jehovah, the brutish tyrant, the power of ignorance and superstition, the power of darkness, Jehovah, understanding nothing, a mere dream. It is a terrible day for Paphnutius when he understands that "the Serpent began to speak to Adam and Eve and to teach them the highest truths, those which do not demonstrate themselves."

All this feeling is in *The Revolt of the*

Angels, the most remarkable of Anatole France's theological books, as *Penguin Island* is his principal political book. It is an amusing story, this idea that the angels, as knowledge and thought spread among them, should one by one desert the heavenly choir, come to earth to live among men, to love them, and attempt to overthrow Him who has stood in the way of every science and of every art. The book is brilliant because it so casually intermingles the actual with the fantastic. The angels who descend to earth and turn into men become music masters (obviously), conspirators, commercial travellers, and here below prepare the spiritual revolution. The career of the principal angel, Arcade, is exceedingly amusing, for he ravages by night the theological libraries, being bent on gaining an education which was not given him in Paradise. And there is a fair amount of the most incongruous, but almost engaging, indecency. It would be too much to describe the incident exactly here, but I think I may

say that Arcade, who is the guardian angel of a young man called Maurice, appears in the latter's bedroom at a moment . . . well, at an inopportune moment. And when at last he has convinced Maurice that he really is an angel, Maurice says something which could be said only by a Parisian: "You may be an angel, but you are not a man of the world." He is wrong, for a little later Arcade, in the very same room, demonstrates to the lady whose reputation he compromised by his sudden materialisation, that angels are close relatives of men.

But apart from scenes where angels button up the boots of ladies, which is very clever of them, considering how little practice they can have had, there is in the book to a much greater extent than in *Thais* a passionate plea for the intellectual side of paganism, the one embodying all that is young and all that is enlightened, embodying the joys which the god of the Jews endeavoured to drive out of the domain of man. And there is more than one picture of Satan as the god

of grace (presumably precipitated into hell on account of his advanced ideas), of Satan loving man. There is picture after picture of the Son of the Morning who once was Pan. In the end the angels do not revolt, for Satan in his dream realises that if he overthrows God and establishes himself as another god, he will only become as his predecessor, harsh, dogmatic, intolerant, greedy of praise, hostile to anything which might rear up in the mind of the people the idea of a new god. Satan will not reign, and he sums up: "What matters if man is no longer subject to Ialdabaoth, if the spirit of Ialdabaoth is still in them? if like him they are jealous, violent, quarrelsome, greedy, inimical to the arts and to beauty? what matters if they have rejected the ferocious demon if they listen not to the friendly demons who teach all truths, to Dionysus, Apollo and the muses? As for us, celestial spirits, sublime demons, we have destroyed Ialdabaoth, our tyrant, if we have destroyed in ourselves ignorance and fear."

IV

HISTORIAN AND POLITICIAN

THOUGH deeply interested in the past, Anatole France has written singularly little pure history. His vision being universal, most of his critical work is informed with historic feeling, but in spite of his love of ancient chronicles, in spite of knowledge which might shame the College of Heralds and the Record Office put together, he has preferred to use history as raw material for romance. He has been right, in a way, for most historians have used romance as the raw material of history and made of it, with a few exceptions, such as Green, Gibbon, Michelet, Mommsen, an unreadable, unfinished product. Anatole France knows that, and possibly he has hesitated to write history because he had not the details he needed to write it as he wished; those details were the history of

the people, the real history, the ploughman's menu, and what the merchant said to his wife about Mr Pitt before they fell asleep; battles and dates make him smile. He expresses this very well in the preface to *The Life of Joan of Arc.* "To discern the future one must consider not the enterprises of the great but the confused movements of the labouring masses."

Once only has he written an actual historic work, and that is his monumental study of Joan of Arc. It has made him more unpopular than all his works put together, from which it is easy to conclude that it is a work of worth and nobility. It is an enormous, encyclopædic study showing that he has consulted every possible source of information: archives, chronicles, diaries, private letters and reports of the merest tittle tattle; he knows almost too much about the Maid of Orleans, and this makes it difficult to read the work. But the one who perseveres will be richly rewarded, for Anatole France sheds some new light upon the

chevalière. It is the preface and the addendum have made him hated by the clericals, for he impugns the chronicles as mostly having been written by chroniclers paid by the knights; pitilessly he shows up their discrepancies, their omissions, he depicts Joan of Arc as a hallucinated, hysterical girl, subject to visions which in those days afflicted many a girl on the threshold of womanhood. For him her sight, smell, hearing, sense of contact, all were decayed, and he inclines to think that she was influenced by priests favourable to the cause of Charles VII. Those priests were politicians and, knowing her simplicity, led her and used her. They had no difficulty in this, for the people were ignorant and believed because they wanted to believe. As he himself says: "Belief in her sanctity was as hypnotic as would be to-day a belief in aeroplanes." It is not wonderful that, assuming an attitude such as this towards one whom M. Bergeret called a military mascot, Anatole France should have been violently

attacked by the reactionaries; that was a little unfair, for all through the book Anatole France recognises the simplicity, the purity, the courage and the true enthusiasm of Joan, but he will not grant her divine inspiration. That is unpardonable in the eyes of the reactionaries, who forget that it took the popes over four hundred and fifty years to canonise her; they want to use Joan of Arc in the cause of the Church and the King, and it does not do at all to have that touching conviction disturbed: it was not the Kaiser invented the alliance of Meinself (und Gott).

Animosity has not disturbed Anatole France, for "one conquers the earth only by ploughing it." He has told the story simply, without heroics, painted a poetic picture of Joan growing up "on bitter soil among rough and sober folk, fed on rosy wine and brown bread, hardened by a hard life"; she had knowledge of tree-worship, and hung garlands on the boughs as does to-day Russian youth on the birch-tree;

she was a pagan and grew up among private wars, fire, blood and murder. It is all extraordinarily living, for Anatole France speaks familiarly, using the names of local tradesmen, peasants and lawyers. And so the story goes on on the well-known lines, continually critical, for Joan reveals the clerical influence by using terms known only to ecclesiastics[1]; she uses sometimes peasant language, sometimes rhetoric, as if she had a double personality; she is fierce, obstinate, firm, as if hypnotised; she impresses the crowd by refusing Charles the name of King until she herself has led him to Reims. Anatole France is fair even to the English, who were cruel only because they were afraid of her as "a superhuman, terrible, frightful creature, a demon from hell before whom the bravest quailed." Anatole France criticises Joan also as a strategist, in which rôle, it seems, she was most incompetent; but faith may inflame where strategy fails. Her strength came

[1] Miracle?

evidently from her inflated view of her mission, so common in lunatic asylums, for she went so far as to dream of a crusade against the Turks and the Hussites. . . .

All this is implied, not stated; Anatole France advances few opinions, digresses not often; he tells the story simply and allows us to draw our own conclusions. Apart from the historical references, the book is as simple as Renan's *Life of Jesus*, and as damaging. Anatole France is happiest when painting pictures of the enthusiastic mobs, swearing the oaths of men-at-arms and singing songs with the ribald women, painting pictures of the towns in the wars of the Middle Ages. At times, however, he cannot restrain himself, must discuss a side issue that interests him, such as the worship of virtue and of virgins. Then his charm grows Virgilian: "In this land of Gaul the white priestesses of the forests had left some memory of their holy beauty; and sometimes one saw, fleeting in the Isle of Sein, along the misty shores of the sea,

the pale shadow of the nine sisters who, in bygone days, at will laid or awoke the storm."

It is not a disrespectful, but a critical book, and I suppose it is true enough that the inspiration of Joan merely served to bring luck to the French troops, was indeed a military mascot. To claim more is to claim a little too much, for did not, during the European War, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Russians, Germans all invoke the Almighty and make quite sure that He was on their side? Yet everybody cannot win; the Christian God is no Janus.

Far more interesting for ordinary reading is his pseudo-novel, *The Gods are Athirst.* In that book he tells the story of a Jacobin, Gamelin, living through the Revolution of 1789, active terrorist, ready to sacrifice sister, mother, sweetheart, upon the altar of liberty, hard, narrow in the forehead, obsessed. Anatole France leads us through sumptuous scenes, the murder of Marat, the death of Robespierre, while Gamelin every

day grows more bloodthirsty, more pitiless. The creature is marvellously living, for in his madness and his blood-lust he responds to all the affectations of revolutionary days, the personal oppositions between the red hands and the white hands, to the ridiculous imitation of Roman citizenship which led to men calling themselves Brutus or Cicero. Yet the ridiculous is not without its nobility, for Gamelin falls at last a victim to the guillotine, and then says, splendidly: "I die justly. It is well that we should bear those insults levelled at the republic against which we should have protected it. We were weak, we have been guilty of indulgence. We have betrayed the republic. . . . Robespierre himself, pure and saintly, sinned by gentleness, by pity . . . I have spared blood, let my blood flow." That is not so extraordinary as it seems, for Gamelin, the executioner, believes in virtue, in a high ideal and, as everybody should know, there is no creature in the world so brutal and so venomous as one who is working for the good of mankind.

The virtue of the book is not in the history, but in Anatole France's acute consciousness of the things that happen while history is being made. There are picnics, talks about art; there is a sentimental amourette between Brotteaux, the old aristocrat, and a sweet courtesan; there is an old priest who does not mind having his head cut off, but does object in court to being called a Capuchin when he really is a Barnabite. It is all deeply human, and one scene at least is unforgettable, a love scene. (Of course . . . those are mostly unforgettable.) It is not the recurrent scene between Gamelin and his mistress who, by the way, and it is a charming irony, invites his rival to her bedroom on the day of Gamelin's execution in exactly the words she used to Gamelin himself; it is a scene on the day when Charlotte Corday murdered Marat. There is a great crowd and Gamelin, in the press, meets his friend Desmahis. He tries to detain him to talk about Marat, but Desmahis is almost in

tears; he curses the crowd, he was following a fair-haired girl, a shopgirl, a divine girl, and the crowd has parted them. "But Marat . . ." says Gamelin. "Marat, Marat!" growls Desmahis. "That's all very well, but I've lost my fair-haired girl."

It is hard to realise that men follow shopgirls while empires fall, but it is most likely, and I suspect that Anatole France thinks it more important.

As it is the fate of Anatole France to be unpopular whatever he does, it is not surprising that *The Gods are Athirst* should have annoyed the advanced people as much as *The Life of Joan of Arc* did the reactionaries. That is because he loves truth and is one of the few people in the world who realise that truth is neither blue nor buff. He has been charged with having fouled the noblest work of man; that is untrue, only he is determined not to be taken in and will not see the Red Virgin as spotless. Great things can be done by little men, done clumsily, cruelly, and yet somehow done.

That is more or less what Anatole France shows in this book; the verdict of the people is not for him the voice of God, but this does not imply that the voice of the aristocrat is any more divine. He cannot help seeing that the democracy is ignorant, prejudiced, greedy, coarse-minded, and yet at the same time he finds in it the seeds of generosity and of that justice so much more costly than the mercy now and then vouchsafed with a fine gesture by those who dominate man. Irony and pity, pity and hope, it is always the same gospel.

In *The Gods are Athirst* Anatole France seemed to have receded from the pronounced socialism which colours his views. That is all on the surface, and in *The Revolt of the Angels*, published a year later, it was obvious that he had denied none of his views; only, and it is so difficult to make people understand this, Anatole France is a Socialist and he is also sane. He will not have it that a Socialist is necessarily a saint; that the democracy is

immaculate; and it is because he finds the human being behind the tribune, while the followers of the tribune insist upon seeing him as a sort of historical hero, a county Achilles, that in their quite honest stupidity they are annoyed. If Anatole France had been born in England and entered politics there, his influence would not have been large, because, in this country, what we like is a good, stodgy, immovable view; if at the age of twenty you believed in Mr Gladstone, at the age of sixty you have to believe in Mr Asquith, and there you are. Doggedness, never say die, the bulldog breed, all that sort of stuff. The idea is that one should run one's head against a brick wall in the hope of knocking it over: one does sometimes, if one's head is hard enough, but that successful kind of head does not readily admit a new idea. Being a Frenchman, Anatole France has been more fortunate; he is not a bit more original than Mr Shaw, though infinitely more *sympatique*, for his smile is honeyed, not

vinegary; still, if Mr Shaw had been a Frenchman his countrymen would have taken him seriously. And we, too, perhaps, once he was translated.

Anatole France came into the open in the course of the Dreyfus case, and since that time he has never ceased to interest himself actively instead of philosophically in everything that was unhappy and oppressed—workers, natives, generally speaking the underdogs. His little book, *The Church and the Republic*, published in 1905, in which he demolishes the case for the absolute freedom of the Catholic Church, because there is not absolute freedom, but only so much as does not clash with other freedoms, had an immense success and powerfully assisted M. Combes in his campaign for Disestablishment. Anatole France, heir of Voltaire and Renan, has always seen the Church, a survival full of charm and grace, as the enemy of the people. Had it not been for the hierarchy, I do not believe he would have attacked the faith: religion

would have made a pretty toy for the child that calls itself man. But religion allied with ministers and financiers, sabre-rattlers, religion *à la* Kaiser, he has sworn to root out. He wants to do this because he has a vision of a humanity to come when none shall suffer at the hands of the State, when one sex will not crush and the other deceive, when black faces may smile on white. He has expounded his creed in many political speeches, though he is not a good speaker; he has come before his audience with his long, whimsical, Pan-like face and his sorrowful eyes, flicking them with irony and yet touching their hearts, asking always for justice and yet for sanity. His speeches are like his writings, except that he has a Latin fondness for the rhetorical question. They are polished, literary, and he generally begins like an American by telling his audience one or two humorous stories: he believes in laughter, and he who laughs with him will soon think with him. But there is always a sting in those stories: it is not for

nothing that he is so fond of telling the old fairy tale of the wrestler who could turn himself into a dragon and then, if St George appeared, into a duck: there are many of our Cabinet ministers who have been dragons at the Albert Hall and ducks in Committee Room 15, with, as Anatole France says, "a domestic animal's mild voice."

It is, however, his writings that matter most; though opposed to war, it is interesting to observe that he approves of the European War of 1914. At the age of seventy he demonstrated this by laying down his pen and asking the French War Office for a rifle. But in the main he hates war, though he be not Tolstoyan enough to believe in non-resistance. He hates war because it is not good business for the soul of man; I do not think he is much upset by slaughter or starvation, for humanity must die somehow, but he knows that a war makes vile those who survive. And if one reads *The White Stone* one easily

understands him. It is an incoherent work, for the several stories it contains are quite unrelated; it is the sort of conversation four or five cultured men might hold if they were to sit up for the night with wine and cigarettes. It is rather long-winded, here and there dull, pedagogic, but it represents him fairly well from an intellectual point of view, though it contains none of the indecency, blasphemy and Falstaffian fun which pervade his writings. It is philosophical, a little rigid, rather Protestant: but then Anatole France is seldom a good Catholic, except when he is chalking up on the cathedral wall: "To hell with the Pope!" The first part is classical, and holds nothing that he has not said in other works except one concentrated phrase: "The saints are a new mythology." He then passes on to the story of Gallio, who is perhaps, philosophically speaking, the most seductive pagan in the New Testament, a minor rival being, of course, Pontius Pilate.

Here is Gallio, administrator of a Roman province, facing the problems of Nero's unsuitable marriage with Octavia, of the education of little boys, and of the fish trade. . . . It is all very Roman, a little pompous, a little dull, rather like England about 1860. Gallio is not joyous, for he has no illusions; he knows that "men will die, will kill every enemy," that "human laws are daughters of anger and fear." And he has official troubles, for the Jews are always indulging in religious wrangles, refusing to have images of the emperor in their temples. This gets Gallio into trouble, and he thinks it absurd, for "one should honour all religions, think them all holy." But the wrangles of the Jews are forced on him, and he despairs of making them understand that they must manage their own silly business, that he is interested only in law and order. He personally thinks that this new God, Christ, is a mere jumble of two old ones, of Orpheus, who descended into hell, and of Adonis, who

suffered and died. Gallio does not object to the new God, but he wishes he would not embarrass the Government; in Gallio's view the new God is a bore, but he is also a nuisance, for "there are in Asia lots of these youthful gods who die and rise again, and good women take more pleasure in them than they should." And then Gallio goes on wearily to control complex administration, while the modernised fictional version of the Acts unfolds . . . and Stephen is stoned while a philosopher makes love to Ioessa. . . .

This touches Anatole France's theories of government, and it is not wonderful that he should be so interested in Saint Paul, whom Gallio would have looked upon as an uneducated person. He speculates agreeably on the discomfort Paul would feel in Rome to-day, unable to understand Catholics and Protestants, and amazed because Judgement Day had not yet occurred. "The only place for him to-day would be Jerusalem." But Anatole France does not long

dwell upon this jumble of religion and government which was evidently suggested to him by the differences between the French State and the Catholic Church. He becomes more general. He believes in a future peace brought about, not by man's goodness, but by economic necessity, which must please Mr Norman Angell. This, of course, involves a change in our attitude to coloured races, who "know us only by our crimes." Anatole France sees that from the point of view of Asia we are the white peril, and he can find no reason why Admiral Togo should not come with twelve battleships to bombard Brest to assist the Japanese trade in France. And then he agreeably meanders; he figures the revolting French besieging the legations of China and Japan in Paris, and Marshal Oyama bringing the allied armies of the East to the Boulevard des Italiens to demand the punishment of the French Boxers, burning down Versailles in the name of a superior civilisation, and stealing the dinner-set of the Elysée. It is all

very cutting if we remember what we did in 1900, and Anatole France amiably adds: "No, this has not happened. Yellow men are not civilised enough so faithfully to imitate the white."

For Anatole France, the colonial mania is purely economic, and he considers that Japan has done a great service to the union of races by compelling the white man to respect the yellow; he does not despair even of the black, who, he points out, are evolving in South America, growing educated and much superior to the Europeans of 2000 B.C. Of course this means "no more colonies," which he looks upon as swindles, for "France has expended men and money so that the Congo, Cochin-China, Annam, Tonkin . . . may buy cotton-goods in Manchester, weapons in Birmingham and Liège, spirits in Dantzig, and claret in Hamburg." He is right, though humanity will not realise that until the day comes for it to haul down its buntings. But he is not hopeless. He believes that even

military men are growing more peaceful, that they want "a pompous, magnificent, shining peace, proud as war." Evidently he must hold such a belief, for in the same book is his idea of Utopia. It is a queer, intellectual Utopia, very different from Mr Wells', and probably rather distasteful to most of us. He figures men and women in the international State, dressed alike (and I wonder whether the other Anatole France has not in his mind the wicked thought of encouraging delightful surprises), work done by machines, a six-hours' day, aeroplanes, small private dwellings, no towns, few crimes (property having gone); he suppresses the legal class, alcohol . . . he even suppresses the colon by operation and then eugenics. It is the ordinary Socialist Utopia with the labour bond system, the right to live for art and science, and the wages of ability; the family, of course, goes, and the sexless increase. That is not unattractive, for I gather that Anatole France wishes to make procreation less

accidental and to confine it to those who feel intimately impelled to it. He sees the cinema and the phonograph ousting the book, which is too individualistic; drama as dead, owing to a lack of comedy and tragedy in life. That is what most of us will dislike in his Utopia (that is to say, tragedy in the lives of other people and comedy in ours). Religion persists, but in a great schismatic mess, and there is even a Pope who fulfils his mission after hours, for he is a dyer in Rome. All this is fairly commonplace, but it carries a number of fine criticisms, some of them generous, such as that of capitalism, which "was a great social progress, created the proletariat, made a state inside the State, prepared the emancipation of the workers and supplied them with means to power." That shows a true sense of the evolution of man: the need for educating him out of his nomadic state by showing him how to combine in factories, armies, republics. And Anatole France is not too ambitious, for he does not think that

equality can be established "as we do not know what it is." All he wants is to assure a living to all and to make work honourable. Likewise he does not imagine perfect liberty, because it is not possible, and, above all, he does not believe that men will be good or bad: "They will be what they will be."

That is what he dreams as he sleeps on the white stone, the species of man evolving into another race possibly fine, possibly vile, but yet worth dreaming of because, as Mr Wells says, man is not final, and so long as a thing is not final it has the charm of a closed bud that conceals a flower the colour of which we do not know. Anatole France does not say whether the flower will burst forth gorgeous red or virginal white; it will be what it will be, and so best, for whatever its colour and its form it will be that thing which he loves in his quiet, smiling, sober way, the flower of life.

V

THE CRAFTSMAN AND THE MAN

THIS may seem *énorme* and yet somehow it is not: Anatole France is not exactly a literary man. He is not a literary man in the sense of Flaubert or Turgenev, for he is not content with being the god in the machine, he is always allowing you to see him guiding it; indeed in most of his work he is the god in the car. That is probably why Anatole France has never adopted classical form. He appreciates it, and in the many critical articles he has written he has praised just those people whose form was perfect . . . but it is the sick man, not the robust man admires health. There is not one of his novels properly holds together. I mean that there is not one that develops harmoniously the story of certain human beings in a given atmosphere. At times, for instance in the four volumes of

Contemporary History, you have the sense of developing lives, and then Anatole France puts on somebody else's coat, like Maître Jacques, transforms himself from coachman into cook, calls himself Bergeret or Bonnard, or, more audaciously, takes on the shape of Vence, the genial worldling, or of Dechartre, the passionate sculptor, and talks. As soon as that happens the novel is forgotten; Anatole France takes the reader by the hand and draws him away to pick intellectual primroses. A delightful exercise; only when hundreds of these primroses are picked you have forgotten the novel you deserted. I have mentioned already the incoherence of *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*. Then there is the famous *Red Lily*, which is supposed to be a love story; it is a love story of the most passionate kind, only it is so inextricably mixed up with mystical excursions by a vagabond, ragged poet, evidently modelled on Verlaine, with views on pictorial art by Vence and Dechartre, that, interested as

one is all the time, one loses one's sense of proportion. When the lovers meet in the beautiful Florentine pavilion one is never sure that theirs is a love feast: at any moment it may turn into an essay on the glazes of Botticelli. Anatole France must at one time have been conscious of this, for in one of his books, *Histoire Comique*, he made a great effort to tell the story of a little actress who threw over her actor lover for a young diplomat, and found after the suicide of the actor that never more could she come together with her new lover because in their tenderest moments she was haunted by the bloody spectre of the dead man. *Histoire Comique* is finely written, and in the best French literary style; it eloquently evokes the life of the French actress, so much on the edge of the *demi-monde* and now and then over the edge. It is almost as good as *Les Petites Cardinal* . . . and then Anatole France spoils it. In comes Doctor Trublet, in other words Anatole France himself, talking about

medicine, about morality, about faith, talking, everlastingly talking. Trublet talks delightfully, but while he talks one thinks of the pretty little actress in whom one had grown interested, and thinks: "Oh, dear old doctor, do stop talking; kisses, not words, shall win the prize." But then Anatole France has never cared whether his ideas were relevant to the *story*; it has always been enough for him that they should be relevant to the *temperament* he sketches.

Perhaps for this reason, and it is an important observation if one is to judge Anatole France fairly, his characters are unusually living. People like Captain Victor, Tudesco, bombastic, ebullient, Falstaffian people, move in our midst. Their creator is always poking fun at them; persistently he erects Aunt Sallies and then throws bouquets at them. He teases them because he loves them. It should be observed, however, and I do not want to be ill-natured about it, that Anatole France never pokes fun at the characters that embody his own person-

ality. Bergeret, the other nice old gentlemen, Vence, Dechartre, are never absurd; they are amiable, scholarly, tender, generous, and have a strong sense of humour. I do not say that Anatole France ought to see his ridiculous side; I do not see it myself, but it must be there. Only, and you must take my word for this without asking for evidence, it is not in the nature of any human being, save the Englishman, to "take himself off." I have known a good many Frenchmen, Germans, Austrians, Spaniards, and have never found in any one of them a glimmer of self-deprecation: they were all supermen, and I expect were much the same before the birth of Nietzsche. Still, and I repeat that I do not want to be ill-natured about it, in spite of that little failing, it must be owned that this little band of incarnations of Anatole France is very human; after all, Anatole France is probably human himself, so far as a man can be human when he is sane. Their humanity resides in their passion for life. Every one of them holds

the creed which is ideally stated in the preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin.* As I believe Anatole France admires Gautier, I will venture to quote from it:

"Pleasure seems to me to be the object of life, and the only useful thing in the world. God has so willed it, who made women, perfume, light, beautiful flowers, good wines, spirited horses, greyhounds and Persian cats. He has not said to his angels: 'Have virtue,' but 'Have love,' and has given us lips more sensitive than the rest of our skin so that we may caress women, eyes raised on high to see the light, subtle scent to breathe the soul of flowers, sinewy thighs to grip the flanks of stallions and to fly swift as thought without railway or engine, delicate hands to draw over the long heads of greyhounds, the velvet lines of cats, and the gleaming shoulders of creatures without virtue; he has given to us alone the treble and glorious privilege of drinking without being thirsty, of lighting tinder and of making love at all times, which distinguishes us from the brutes much more than the habits of reading newspapers and manufacturing maps."

In this preface lives much of Anatole France, his pure hedonism, his pagan love of the beautiful, his entire lack of moral purpose, counteracted by his consciousness of the decent, the elegant thing. If he believes, as I think he does, in honour, in truth, courtesy, pity, service, it is not owing to any harsh Protestant moral impulse, but to a feeling that there are fine, clean things revealed to us by some obscure Kantian, categorical imperative; if he has a morality at all it is the Ingersollian morality, that is to say obligation perceived by a fine soul. It is this inflames his style and links him with his forbears, with Voltaire, with Renan, with Molière, with the Italians of the sixteenth century, with the amiable Latins, with all the dead who loved the sunshine, with the gay gods, and the warriors who, on the way to the Elysian fields, did not turn their backs upon wine, woman and song. Not for him the sombre fates of duty, fear, retribution; not for him malignant Jove any more than malignant Jehovah. In the

trenches in 1870 he read, not Sophocles, not Æschylus, but Virgil. As Brotteaux went to the guillotine he read Lucretius. For him flowers and honey to lay upon the little altars in Ausonian glades, and not the rapes and arguments of ancient Greece.

A Latin by heredity, it follows that Anatole France wields a style of singular purity. His work is very polished and very condensed. He uses as few words as possible to embody his idea, and when he has made his point, as, for instance, in stories such as *The Procurator of Judæa*, he stops. His desire is to knock out his reader, but he does not, like Zola, then proceed to kneel and to roll upon the prostrate figure, smothering it and flattening it out under a vast bulk. Anatole France never flounders; he does not follow the man who did so much damage to the literature of the nineteenth century by piling up seventeen unessential details, crowned, often by accident, with the essential one. Selection is with him a habit, and that is why Anatole France will never be

confounded with the Zolas, the Sudermanns, the William de Morgans. Without selection he never could have achieved his delicate little pictures of men and women, of their passions stated in a paragraph; and still less could he have built those strange animals that he so loves. They are not always philosophical animals like Riquet, the dog, praying to man, his god; sometimes like Miragoane, they are just intelligent, doggy dogs, tail-wagging, greedy, apologetic, fulsome dogs; at other times they are just decorative beasts, especially the cats. For Anatole France, like Théophile Gautier, like Baudelaire, like Edgar Allan Poe, like almost every artist who really is an artist, loves cats. In his eyes the cat is as beautiful as woman. Here is a scrap, which I feel I render inadequately, devoted to sumptuous Hamilcar, the Persian cat in the library:

"Hamilcar, somnolent prince in the city of books, watcher in the night! Thou dost defend against vile rodents those things, manuscript and printed, bought for the old

student by his modest hoard and his tireless zeal. In this silent library which thy military virtues protect, Hamilcar, sleep languid as a sultana. For thou dost unite in thy person the formidable air of a Tartar warrior and the indolent grace of an Eastern maid. Heroic and voluptuous Hamilcar, sleep until the mice shall dance in the moonlight before the *Acta Sanctorum* of the learned Bollandists."

That is poetry, though, as I have suggested before now, Anatole France, in spite of his great love of the beautiful, is too critical, too humorous, has too much detachment to be written down a poet. He loves the poets, notably Racine, and one does not quite see why. But he is not a poet because, I think, he is too remote; the blood of the earth does not flow in his veins, and it may be that if he were closely questioned he would confess that he thinks life very useful to literature. That is perhaps why he tolerates it so well, why he can smile at it, be serious and yet poke fun at it. What a Fabian he would have made!

One word as to his short stories. He is in these more purely literary than in his novels, presumably because in short stories he has not space enough to get out of hand. A few of them, such as *The Procurator of Judæa*, and one or two of the revolutionary tales in *Mother of Pearl*, are as good as any French short stories, while *Crainquebille* and *Putois* reach the highest standard of de Maupassant. Still, there is nothing to say about them here: there is only one thing to do, and that is to read them. There are others, though, worth mentioning because, together with their fine literary facture, they carry the author's ideas. For instance, in *Les Sept Femmes de la Barbe Bleue*, Anatole France sets to work to rehabilitate Blue-beard, who, he contends, was henpecked and deceived, though a very good fellow. This is Anatole France's little fling at rumour and misrepresentation. It amuses him to trace rumour to its sources, and I can imagine as good a story as *Putois*, the gardener who was invented and in the end nearly

managed to exist, being written round the story of the bombs in the German governess's bedroom that floated about during the early part of the war. This is half mystical and Anatole France is not a mystic, but he has written several stories, to which I refer a little later on, starting from which it might be contended that if humanity believed strongly enough in the bomb under the bed the House of Commons might eventually be blown up. Most of the short stories, however, are merely novels *in petto*; some are mediæval, many Italian, and, every now and then, they are modern and ironic. Most of them, such as *La Chemise*, where operations become fashionable among the Smart Set and where the professor asks Society, "together a crowd and an élite," to his five-o'clock operation, "a charming bit of ovariotomy," to the accompaniment of flowers, pretty frocks, music and ices, are a criticism of life. This story recalls a kind of life we know, for we are told that "the professor's elegance and grace were

marvellous. The operation was taken for the cinema."

All through these stories runs his philosophy:

"I love life which is earthy life, life as it is, this dog's life. I love it brutal, vile and gross. I love it sordid, dirty, spoilt; I love it stupid, imbecile and cruel; I love it in its obscenity, in its infamy, with its violence, its stinks, its corruptions and its infections. . . . On Sundays I go among the people, I mix with the crowd that flows in the streets, I plunge into groups of men, women and children, which form round street-singers or before the booths at fairs; I touch dirty coats and greasy bodices; I breathe the strong, warm scents of sweat, of hair, of breaths. In this well of life I feel further from death. Death: nothingness, that is an infinite naught, and this naught envelops us. Thence we come and hence we go; we are always two nothingnesses as a shell upon the waters. Nothingness is the impossible and the assured; it is inconceivable and it is."

A quotation such as this, taken in con-

junction with the earlier quotation from the preface of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, outlines the man within the writer, and I need not labour that the faith of Anatole France is the faith of Epicurus, of Petronius Arbiter, of Villon, of Rabelais, of Fielding. The whole basis of him is sensuality, and I hate to say this in a country such as England, where the maypole has been cut down and Calvinism reigns supreme, where sensuality, that once whispered melodies into the ears of Pan and hung garlands about the birch-trees, has been hated and hunted until it had to take refuge in the dirty talk of the public-house.

The sensuality of Anatole France is like sap arising in the trees, like the moth circling about the candle; it is joyous, frank, unashamed; the world and all that is in it is its toy. In this country it has become disgusting to like good food; you must not even talk of food, it is not done (and the result is English food, the laughing-stock of the universe). But listen to Anatole France on food in *Histoire Comique*:

"The Castelnaudary stew contains the preserved thighs of geese, whitened beans, bacon and a little sausage. To be good it must have been cooked lengthily upon a gentle fire. Clémence's stew has been cooking for twenty years. She puts into the pan sometimes goose or bacon, sometimes sausage or beans, but it is always the same stew. The foundation endures; this ancient and precious foundation gives the stew the quality that in the pictures of old Venetian masters you find in the women's amber flesh. . . ."

Here speaks the old Gaul who feasted on roast meats, drank much hydromel, and as he caressed the long droop of his fair moustache cast a negligent, amiable glance over his white-skinned, blue-eyed, black-haired women. For the Gaul never forgot women; he had anticipated Nietzsche by two thousand years or so, and decided that man was for war and woman for the recreation of the warrior. This offends some of us moderns, for the sensuality of the Frenchman, so strong in Anatole France, the

sensuality of eating and drinking, of burlesque, of gross stories, some of them concerned with an apartment ignored in the English household since the days of William IV., lies thick over love.

It seems a pity to us that, in spite of all his æstheticism, of his sense of beauty, it should look as if Anatole France's view of love were contained in the famous phrase of Alphonse Karr, or Gustave Droz, I forget which:

"Love? A matter of skin."

Well, love is not a matter of skin, at least for us, and one would wish that Anatole France should have found something ethereal, symbolic in the union of man and woman. I cannot explain what I mean: I detest the word "spirituality," and I hardly know what I miss in this French view of love that Anatole France holds, but I miss it. This view is not exactly: "One woman is as good as another," but it certainly is: "One woman is as good as another if she is good-looking." It is all flesh, and

æsthetics, which do redeem the flesh, do not redeem it fully. The French heroine, beloved of Anatole France's heroes, is merely Galatea animate; she is just the beautiful woman descended from her pedestal at the call of her chosen lover. Nothing calls to him save the warm body that once was beautiful marble, and he is content. *The Red Lily* illustrates that idea. Here we have two people, an unfaithful wife and her lover. We are convinced by the suggestion of extreme passion that these people have reached the apogee of love. It is an unhappy, tormented love, unrolling near the Arno. It develops among a curious society of literary people, is coloured by the usual literary and artistic ideas of Anatole France. Dechartre, the lover, is tormented because his mistress had before him another lover; he is not tormented by the existence of her husband. His distress grows so intense when he begins to suspect, quite wrongly, that she is unfaithful to him with her first lover, produces a strain so great, that their

alliance breaks. Well, that is natural enough, for, as Anatole France himself remarks, man is possessive and woman is not, because she has had to get used to sharing, but it is difficult to understand at first sight why Dechartre should be jealous of another lover, and not jealous of a husband. The answer, which is not evident to everybody, is that the act of love is symbolic and that a husband, taken as a social base, is not comparable with a lover taken for love.[1] That is true enough, but where fault must be found with the Gallic view is that there is not a single phrase in the book to show that Dechartre, represented as in the throes of extreme love, wishes to detach his mistress from her husband. He never suggests that he wants her to live with him always, that he wants her society, her presence, the subtle delight of hearing her walk in the room above. He wants nothing but her body from four to six,

[1] Relations between husband and wife may have ceased, but this does not touch the argument.

twice a week: he is honourable, he is an artist, but he is vile, he is a beast. Big words these, but I have come to think that if we differ at all from the brute it is by the courage with which we face the consequences of our deeds, by delicacies of feeling in which caresses have no place, by something that is more than elegance, that can maintain love when sickness, ugliness appear and æsthetics fall to the ground. There is not in the works of Anatole France a line devoted to love. Whether in *The Red Lily* or in *The Merrie Tales of Jacques Tournebroche*, or in any of the episodes, "love" is either light and false and lying, or coarse and brutal, or limited by the passing efflorescence of a beauty that must die. He seems, like every other Frenchman I can think of, unable to understand what the Anglo-Saxon means by idealism in love, by that idealism so often made absurd by sentiment, but yet delightful, and distinguished from the impulse of a stag in rut.

And yet, strange to say, Anatole France

has written a few stories in which there is a hint of mysticism. *Histoire Comique* is a story of a haunting; in *Adrienne Buquet* there is telepathy; in *The Graven Stone* a fatal influence. There is *Putois* too, that famous tale of a metaphysical conception in virtue of which a man who was originally a joke ends "like a mythological deity, in becoming actual." There is *A Daughter of Lilith*, a tale of an immortal and fatal descendant of the pre-Adamites. But those, I feel, are intellectual exercises, and I suspect that they spring from a passing idea of the author: "I think I'll write a mystical story; it would be rather fun."

The true Anatole France which hides under the sentimental old gentlemen, so cynical and so human, born so cold and today so young, is the irreverent, jolly, blasphemous Frenchman of the Middle Ages. I have said this often and quoted much in support because I want to make the English understand what is so difficult for them to understand: the Gaul and his joviality.

Still I cannot resist quoting a story from *Penguin Island*, which I am compelled to condense:

There was once a king and he had a beautiful queen. At their court lived a young monk, called Oddoul, who resisted the devil and even woman. So the queen, being woman and ambitious, attempted his seduction. She called him into her chamber, and he would not look upon her. She held out her arms to him, and he fled. Then in her fury, as he fled, she called the guard and accused Oddoul of having attempted to ravish her. He was thrown into gaol. But in the night, as he waited for the time to come when he would be led out to be burnt alive, the cell was visited by the angel of the Lord. And the angel said: "What? Hast thou not done what the Queen accuses thee of?" "No," said Oddoul. "Then," cried the angel, "what art thou doing here, idiot?" The angel of the Lord opened the door and Oddoul found himself driven out of the prison. Scarcely had he gone down into the street when a hand from high above emptied upon his head a pailful of slops. And

he thought: "Mysterious are Thy designs, O Lord, and Thy ways impenetrable."

It is not easy to understand Anatole France because, like other men, he is neither good nor evil; he is merely what he is. I do not ask anyone to forgive him because he loved much, nor to try and understand, if that is the only way of forgiving him. It is very much better to thank him for having brought into the dusty old lumber-room of stale ideas the breath of the new; for having proclaimed pity in a world that had slid into callousness; for having been gay when the creeds bade us be sad. To do that, if one can, is enough, for though one may not understand him quite, the times not yet being enlightened, one can offer him the supreme tribute of loving him without understanding.

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